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# THE AUK:

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### NOTES OF AN ORNITHOLOGICAL TRIP IN ARIZONA AND SONORA.

BY F. STEPHENS.

IN March, 1884, Mr. C. G. Pringle, of Charlotte, Vt., made a journey by wagon from Tucson, Arizona, southwest to the Gulf of California, collecting botanical specimens; on this trip he was so successful as to wish to make another. Early in August he invited me to accompany him on a second journey over the same route, an invitation I very gladly accepted. The route lay over deserts most of the way, and as horse-feed and water had to be carried in some of the most interesting portions of the route, I took but a light 50-cal. gun instead of my 12-bore,— a mistake I afterwards regretted.

I did not intend making many skins, partly because I wished to add as little as possible to the material necessary to carry, and partly because the birds were now moulting and in poor condition. Therefore this must be a record more of what I saw than of what I got. As the country traversed is almost a *terra incognita* I will describe some of its principal features, to give a better understanding of its bird life.

Leaving Tucson August 7, 1884, we drove up the valley of the Santa Cruz a few miles and turned to the southwest over a gap in the low Sierra de Tucson, and emerged on a plain. Along the higher edge of the plain are many giant cactuses (*Cereus gigan-*

teus), mesquit, palo-fierro trees, and a general assortment of smaller cactuses. In this semi-forest growth were several characteristic desert species, such as *Colaptes chrysoides*, *Centurus uropygialis*, *Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*, and *Amphispiza bilineata*. Further along this tree and cactus growth disappeared, leaving a plain only very sparsely covered with grass, where birds were nearly absent except some *Calamospiza bicolor*, then migrating. Nearly all these were males in the black and white breeding plumage; but they had nearly all changed to the winter plumage by our return some three weeks later. On a solitary little mesquit tree in the plain I saw a Hawk, and on approaching to see what the species was I observed a large nest in the same tree. Finding the Hawk not wild I killed it. It proved to be a young *Buteo swainsoni*, and was probably reared in the tree where it was killed. At our night camp I shot a *Callipepla squamata*. The next day we drove west of south over a narrowing part of the plain. In places there was a fair growth of grass, and again more or less brush, but almost no cactuses. In the morning we watered the horses at a well one hundred and eighty-six feet deep, paying ten cents per horse. A heavy rain appeared to be falling to the south, which we were glad to see, as it insured us water for our night camp. *Peucea cassini* was common and I heard one *P. arizonæ*.

On the morning of the 9th I heard *Callipepla squamata* ahead, and started on in advance of the wagon, but failed to get any. Shot three *Peucea arizonæ*, and saw several *Otocorys*. After walking three or four miles I waited for the wagon, which had not come on as soon as I expected. While waiting I heard a faint *bob-white* back along the road, and started back in a hurry. After looking and listening for a mile or so along the road I saw and shot a *Callipepla squamata*. Thinking I might have mistaken the *cu-en* of this species for the other call, I gave up further search and went to where Mr. Pringle and his assistant were collecting plants. We soon drove on, but before we had gone a quarter of a mile a Partridge ran behind a bush, and I knew that a bird new to me was before me. As I jumped out of the wagon it ran on to the next bush. I flushed it from behind the cover but missed the bird as it flew away. I marked it down among some bunches of sacaton grass, but failed to find it again. It was a much darker bird than I had expected to see, its head being very

dark, and it appeared almost brick red below as it flew away. I had been led to suppose that the unknown Partridge said to occur in this region was *Ortyx graysoni*, and from its description I expected to see a bird much the color of *O. virginiana*; but this bird was evidently something else. In the afternoon I heard another *bob-white*, and guided by the notes, I found the bird, perched on a branch of a small mesquit tree. Creeping up behind a small bush I succeeded in getting within twenty yards of it, but even this short range was too far for my little gun and No. 10 shot. I had a good view of this bird, and I certainly believe *this* one was *O. graysoni*. It had none of the reddish tint of the lower parts of the other bird, and had a plain whitish stripe on the side of the head. The notes, plainly heard, were two, *bob-white*; the *bob* was as loud as the *white*, but this last note lacked the ring of the last note of *O. virginiana*. I believe this to be the only *O. graysoni* I have ever seen, if it really was *graysoni*.

In the afternoon we watered the horses at the stage station, kept by a Mexican. The water had been hauled from a spring five miles away, and they charged us twenty-five cents per horse. Camped for the night in the best grass we saw on the route. The large spiders known in Arizona as tarantulas were abundant here, and my companions were not pleased with the prospect of such bed-fellows. I had camped out too long in the deserts to care for them.

I was awakened at daybreak by the call of *bob-white*, and was not long in turning out. How I wished for my 12-bore, for I knew that I had very little chance with my little gun and No. 10 shot in this open prairie. There appeared to be several of the birds scattered singly in various directions, but after two or three calls they became silent, perhaps because of the lateness of the season. When I heard a call I would go in the direction of the sound and wait to hear it again, generally without success. After a little another would strike up in another direction, and I spent the morning wandering about, but saw only one bird, which I missed. As it flew toward the rising sun it appeared bright red beneath. The notes that I heard with distinctness were different from those I heard the preceding afternoon. They were three instead of two, like *ah-bob-white*, similar to those of *O. virginiana*, but the *ah* louder in proportion, the emphasis increasing to the *white*, which had some ring.

This camp was near the divide between the Gila and Altar Rivers, and the country became more broken, barren mesas alternating with brushy arroyos. Grass became very scarce from this on. In the forenoon we passed the Mexican custom-house of Sasabe, where we obtained written permission to travel in Sonora one month. A few miles below Sasabe I saw a pair of *Ortyx*, the male with a dark head and reddish beneath, the female (?) dull brown, and I thought its head was subcrested. They were not very wild, and I wounded the male, but it got into a thick bush and could not be found. It probably crept into some squirrel hole, of which there were several under the bush. Shot a *Pyrrhuloxia sinuata*, and saw others. Also saw several *Lophortyx gambeli* and got a chick but a few days old. On the morning of the 11th, I got three *Callipepla squamata*. This is about their southwestern limit. A little further on I saw an *Ortyx* cross the road, and made out to kill it. This proved to be a male, the type of Mr. Wm. Brewster's *Colinus ridgwayi*.\* It had a dark head and reddish breast and abdomen, and was the same bird that I had seen further back.

As our night camp was made in very good collecting ground we laid over all day on the 12th. There are several volcanic hills near, and plenty of small trees and cactuses. I obtained seven *Peucea carpalis*, including adults and young. Saw *Polioptila plumbea*, *Amphispiza bilineata*, *Centurus uropygialis*, *Colaptes chrysoides*, and many other birds.

On the 13th we drove down a narrow valley all day. It was moderately well timbered, and the cactuses, *Cereus schottii* and *C. thurberi*, began to appear. At our night camp *Progne subis* was abundant and noisy. Saw *Phainopepla nitens* during the day.

On the 14th I took a nest and set of eggs of *Pipilo fuscus mesoleucus*, killing the parent; also a *Harporhynchus curvirostris palmeri*, having a very large bill. Passed through Altar, a town of some 1200 or 1500 inhabitants, on the Altar River, here a small stream one can nearly jump across. It was the first stream we had seen since leaving Tucson. Here we took the river road to Caborca, some thirty miles distant, passing Pedroquito midway. Near Pedroquito I shot a *Scardafella inca*, and saw others. This Dove seems to prefer the small cultivated enclosures around

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\* See Auk, II, p. 199.

the houses, and lives more on the ground than *Chamæpelia passerina*, which is more abundant in the same region, but is commonest in brush. *S. inca* has a coarse note. I saw a little group on the ground, the males strutting around the females, carrying their tails nearly vertical, and cooing. As most of these Doves were near houses I refrained from shooting, for the people would have been alarmed by Americans firing so near them.

At a quartz mill near Caborca we found four Americans, and were glad to meet men we could converse with, our Spanish being too limited for satisfactory communication with the natives. They were even better pleased to see a party from the United States. This is a very fine collecting locality. At daybreak on the morning of the 16th, I heard the *cu-cu-cu-cu* of *Glaucidium phalænoides*, and shot it in a Thurber's cactus. There were enormous numbers of Doves in the timber. Their cooing was so loud and continuous that one could scarcely distinguish any other bird-note. *Melopelia leucoptera* was the principal noise-maker. As the sun gained height the noise diminished. We felt the heat here more than further inland, although the thermometer averaged some 15° lower than at Tucson; yet the least exertion made us drip with perspiration. There did not seem to be a breath of air. The last water of the Altar is used up here in irrigating, and we had to depend on the wells again, and they proved very few. About the Poso Moroneno (*poso* is well) the new giant cactus, *Cereus pringlei*, is abundant. This species *is* a giant, averaging as tall as *C. giganteus*, say 30 feet for moderately tall ones; branches more numerous and both branches and trunk more massive. Among the thousands of these cactuses I saw were scarcely any Woodpecker holes; probably insect life is too scarce, for the Woodpeckers were seldom seen. Birds of all kinds were very rare. At the San Felix mine I shot an *Auriparus flaviceps* and two *Campylorhynchus brunneicapillus*.

After leaving the San Felix mine we saw no human being until our return to the Poso Moroneno. We filled our water barrels here as a precaution, and had reason to congratulate ourselves on having done so, as we found the water at the Gringo Well so foul that neither man nor horse would drink it. On the low sandy plain, ten to twenty miles back from the Gulf, I saw thirteen *Harporhynchus lecontei* and secured three. Another wounded one escaped me by crawling into a labyrinth of squirrel holes.

Their call-notes (no song heard) were similar to those of *H. lecontei* heard elsewhere, but an undefinable difference in their actions caused me to think they might be different, which feeling was increased by their darker colors. They were in the moult, some having nearly full fall plumage, which contrasts very strongly with the much lighter, faded summer dress. Others, better competent than I to give an opinion, think them not distinct from *H. lecontei*.

About noon on the 20th we reached Port Lobos, the proposed terminus of the Tucson and Port Lobos Railroad. It is a town, strictly, in name only, as there is not a habitation nor inhabitant. The last wagon track made on the road from the mine to the Gulf was made by Mr. Pringle's wagon in his former journey. Fortunately we found the water in the old well fit for use, but grass for the horses was absolutely wanting, and we were therefore forced to turn back the next morning. I spent most of the afternoon along the beach. At high tide the surf washes the base of the high cliffs of cemented gravel. Some four or five miles to the northwest was a low rocky point (Point Lobos). By the aid of a field glass I could see many sea birds there, apparently several species of Gulls and Cormorants. Quite a number of Gulls were flying about, but few came near and I did not attempt to shoot any. A decaying Tern washed ashore, of which I wrote down a brief description on the spot, tallies pretty well with *Sterna anæsthesa*. Saw several Ospreys and a large Hawk, but the latter was too far away to identify. Two Sparrows shot at the foot of the cliffs Mr. Wm. Brewster identifies as *Passerculus rostratus*.\* I also took a ♀ juv. *Calypte costæ*, probably migrating. Saw several large long-necked seals. Large turtles were abundant outside the surf, and several turtle shells lay along high-water mark. I should think fish were abundant. The surf was small and frequent. The tides apparently rise and fall nearly fifteen feet. In the distance we could see the higher parts of Isla Angel de la Garda, and further to the right was a faint blue line of mountain peaks on the peninsula of Lower California.

What a grand field, although a very difficult one, this Gulf and its shores present for scientific exploration! It was with regret at our inability to stay longer that we turned back in the morning. Two or three miles back from the beach I saw a small covey of

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\* See Mr. Brewster's paper in 'The Auk' for April, 1885, pp. 196-200.

*Lophortyx gambeli*. The next day I took another *Harporhynchus lecontei* and saw three more. Rain fell steadily nearly all day, and as that made us independent of wells we struck across country to the Poso Moroneno. Traveling was very bad, and we even mired twice, and were delayed by swollen streams where were dry 'washes' as we came down. The scarcity of provisions was becoming a serious matter with us, as we had not counted on delays by *excess* of water, but we finally reached Caborca, dinnerless. While camped over night twenty miles below Caborca, waiting for the water to subside enough to allow our crossing, I heard at twilight what I supposed was a *Micrathene whitneyi*, but failed to get it. The next morning I heard it again and saw two small Owls in a bush before it was light enough to tell positively what species they were, but the one I shot was *Glaucidium phalaenoides*; the other disappeared, so it is possible that the two species may have similar notes, as from their actions I think these two Owls were of the same species.

Nothing further worth noting was seen until we passed Sasabe. On reaching the good grass we gave the horses a day's rest, and I searched for 'Bob-whites,' but failed to find any, but shot a *Centronyx bairdi*, and the next day a second. Each was alone, not wild; no note was heard, and its flight was zigzag.

Reached Tucson September 1, having traveled nearly five hundred miles on the round trip. While my lot of skins was small, only about fifty, Mr. Pringle brought in a large quantity of plants, very many of which proved to be new, and we voted the journey a success.

A few days later Mr. Herbert Brown showed me two male *Colinus ridgwayi*, sent him a short time before from the neighborhood of the Baboquivori Mountains, within Arizona; so this species has positively been taken within the United States.

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## THE GULLS OF THE CALIFORNIAN COAST.

BY H. W. HENSHAW.

IN fall and winter the coast of California, and, indeed, the whole Pacific coast from Puget Sound to Cape St. Lucas, is fairly